

THE DOCTRINE & POLITY COMMITTEE
OF THE CHURCH OF GOD

August 2019

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1 Corinthians 14:34-35
“Are Women to Remain Silent in the Church?”

In ways similar to 1 Timothy 2:8-15, the passage in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 admonishes women to be silent in the churches. While some scholars dismiss the 1 Timothy passage as later than Paul (and therefore non-Pauline), that is not the path that we have chosen to follow. Some scholars have wondered if the 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 passage is not by Paul but perhaps inserted by a later copyist. Others have seriously proposed that Paul is simply quoting statements by a group of Corinthians (vv. 34-35) in order to refute them (v. 36), as he had already done in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 7:1; and 10:23. We are attempting to ascertain the meaning of Paul's strong statements against women speaking aloud in the congregations in both 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians. Since one's view on these two verses has an impact on how one understands what Paul is saying about women overall, we will consider the various interpretations carefully.

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? (1 Cor. 14:34-36NIV)

Various Approaches to 1 Corinthians 14:34-36

Before we attempt to understand the meaning of this passage, we need to step back to deal with several ways that scholars approach this passage. These may be summarized as follows:

1. Issues with textual manuscripts (Is there an “interpolation” by later copyists?)
2. Contradiction of 14:34-35 with 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (If women can prophesy and pray in church as in 11:2-5, then how can they do this and yet be silent?)
3. Is Paul quoting the Corinthians in vv. 34-35 and refuting them in v. 36? (also known as the “slogan hypothesis”).

Let us consider these approaches one-by-one.

I. Issues with Textual Manuscripts

Several prominent scholars have raised the question whether this passage is an *interpolation* by a later copyist or scribe. An interpolation is an insertion of something of a different nature into a text. In this case, it refers to some scholars' belief that vv. 34-35 were written later by someone other than Paul and inserted between verses 33b and 37. What evidence exists for such an unusual view? First, it should be clear that no manuscript of the New Testament omits 14:34-

35. Second—and importantly—there are manuscripts from the late 300s AD and following in which an entire “Western” tradition places vv. 34-35 at the end of the chapter, that is, *after* v. 40. What might cause a copyist to transfer a section of material from after v. 33 to after v. 40? Apparently, the content did not seem to fit the flow of the argument. Within a discussion of prophecy and tongues, vv. 34-35 seemed out of place. Paul had been discussing the manifestation of gifts, but for two verses he shifted to talk about people. There is not a hint of the gifts in these two verses.¹ The Pentecostal scholar and textual critic of the New Testament, Gordon Fee, has noted that some prominent Western manuscripts follow this tradition of placing vv. 34-35 *after* v. 40.² Such manuscripts mean that the Western (Latin) church had it this way for hundreds of years.³ Along with the internal evidence of potential contradiction with Paul himself (in 1 Cor. 11) as well as not fitting the flow of the argument, Fee suggests that the evidence for vv. 34-35 being Pauline casts “considerable doubt on their authenticity.”⁴

What would be the significance of this proposal, if it were true? It would mean that some scribe thought it was important to impose the later ideals of limited involvement of women in the churches upon Paul’s original text. Therefore, these verses would not be part of Paul’s writings and as a result would not be a universal biblical mandate to follow today.

However, there is strong disagreement concerning this proposal among other scholars. In particular, Curt Niccum has disagreed with Philip Payne and Gordon Fee by pointing to Payne’s proposals regarding the markings on manuscripts (called “*distigmai*”) as “untenable” and the overall approach of Fee regarding interpolation as wrong.⁵ Other scholars call the arguments for interpolation “not weighty”⁶ or “limited” and “problematic.”⁷ Even Fee admits that the earlier and more weighty manuscripts all place vv. 34-35 after v. 33b, not after v. 40.⁸ Further, scholar Antoinette Clark Wire has noted that all the manuscripts cited by Fee seem to rest on a single tradition. In other words, when one sifts through the manuscript evidence, there remains only two “witnesses” of this tradition—and they appear to come from a single “common archetype”

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 701.

² These are manuscripts from about the late 300s AD to about 600 AD. They are D F G 88* a b d f g.

³ Fee, *Corinthians*, 701.

⁴ Fee, *Corinthians*, 699. This view is supported by the following NT scholars: Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James L. Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 247: “All things considered, this passage is best explained as a gloss introduced into the text...”; John Ruff, *Paul’s First Letter to Corinth*, in *Westminster Pelican Commentaries*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 154, who suspects interpolation; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, ed. George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 246, 249, who notes that v. 37 links with 33a, not v. 36; Graydon F. Snyder, *First Corinthians: A Faith Community Commentary* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1992), 184, who thinks it is better to view 34-35 as an addition from a later time; and Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 227-67, whose forty-page treatise on this subject is the most thorough argument to date.

⁵ Curt Niccum, “The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for 1 Cor 14:34-5,” *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 242-55, here 243.

⁶ Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, in *Sacra Pagina Series*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 516.

⁷ Jill E. Marshall, *Women Praying and Prophesying in Corinth: Gender and Inspired Speech in First Corinthians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 203-04; also, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1148-50.

⁸ Fee, *Corinthians*, 699. These manuscripts include p⁴⁶ A B K Ψ 0243 33 81 and 1739Maj.

from which the later manuscripts were copied.⁹ This means that a single text from the West may have been copied with the changes, thereby providing a pattern for later copies. However, this still does not explain why the same variances did not occur in the Greek (Eastern) textual tradition—one that is much older as well.

Nevertheless, problems remain with these verses. Interpolation may still be regarded as possible. As Gordon Fee concedes, “On the whole, therefore, the case against these verses is so strong, and finding a viable solution to their meaning so difficult, that it seems best to view them as an interpolation.”¹⁰ In other words, there is still the “thorny” issue of what these verses may mean in contrast to 1 Corinthians 11 where women are praying and prophesying. Don’t these words in vv. 34-35 seem to contradict 1 Corinthians 11:2-5?

2. Contradiction of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 with 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

This brings us to our next approach to understanding what Paul meant, namely the apparent contradiction between women praying/prophesying and women being silent in the churches. A number of proposals have been offered to ameliorate this apparent tension. Let’s consider them.

First, some have seen the meetings described in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14 as different in terms of type. For example, some see the meetings in 1 Corinthians 11 as *private meetings*—that is, informal gatherings for worship and perhaps teaching,¹¹ while the meetings in 1 Corinthians 14 were formal, “official” worship services for the church. Therefore, women “are allowed to prophesy but not when the congregation officially meets.”¹² Perhaps Paul had in mind different kinds of gatherings.¹³ However, there is nothing in the texts that makes such a demarcation between the locations of the worship settings.¹⁴

Second, some have viewed the *kind of speech* of the two passages as different. Perhaps Paul was addressing a type of “chatter” in 1 Corinthians 14 that is different from “inspired speech” in 1 Corinthians 11. Perhaps Paul was providing admonition on a *specific* practice in Corinth that the readers understood, but from which we are too distant now to grasp.¹⁵ This could be supported by v. 35 where Paul tells the women to “ask their own husbands at home” (see 1 Cor. 14:35 NIV). It appears, then, that some of the talk was disruptive of congregational worship. While the word here for “speak” [λαλεῖν | *lalein*] could mean “chatter” in ancient classical Greek, it rarely held

⁹ Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 149.

¹⁰ Fee, *Corinthians*, 705.

¹¹ Fee, *Corinthians*, 703.

¹² Frederik W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 341. “Women who have received the gift of prophecy, are not to use their *exousia* in the meetings of the church.”

¹³ Pheme Perkins, *First Corinthians*, in *Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament*, ed. Mikeal C. Parsons and Charles H. Talbert (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 164; cf. also Ruef, *Paul’s First Letter to Corinth*, 155.

¹⁴ It could be noted here that A. J. Tomlinson in 1910 understood 1 Cor. 14:34-35 to prohibit women from speaking in business meetings of the church, but there is nothing in the text itself to point to this distinction. See “Further Study Report: Meaning and Usage of the Term ‘Bishop,’ Presented to the International General Council of the Church of God, 77th General Assembly (2018), 21. See also “Should the Office of Bishop Be Available to Women Ministers in the Church of God?” in *A Study of the Issue of Women Serving as Ordained Bishops: Position Papers* (2006), 15-16.

¹⁵ Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians*, in *New International Biblical Commentary*, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 304-06.

that meaning in the *Koine* Greek of the New Testament.¹⁶ Whether or not it was “chatter,” it was certainly disruptive.¹⁷ Perhaps some of the talking “may have been questioning out loud about what the last speaker said or meant.”¹⁸ There seems some support in the text for this proposal, which we will consider more carefully later in the summary thoughts.

Third, some scholars suggest that Paul is addressing women in general in 1 Corinthians 11 and wives in particular in 1 Corinthians 14.¹⁹ When the Greek word for “male” or “husband” (ἀνὴρ | *anēr*) is in close proximity to the Greek word for “woman” (γυνή | *gynē*), the latter term (*gynē*) usually means “wife.” It is suggested that this proximity is the case here in 1 Corinthians 14, but not in 1 Corinthians 11 where the context suggests male and female *in general*. C.K. Barrett reminds readers that married women in ancient Greece and Rome were frequently required to be silent—it was the custom of the culture that silence would reflect best on one’s husband.²⁰ Romans, Greeks, and Hellenistic Jews cited such cultural values.²¹ Perhaps the Corinthian women (the “enthusiasts” or the “spiritual ones”—*pneumatikoi*) were beginning to “blur distinctions” between men and women so Paul called them back to a more Jewish expectation of public behavior for women in the synagogue.²² However, once again, we simply do not know which group Paul was considering here—and the linguistic evidence does not always give us the certitude we might desire.

Finally, some scholars suggest that women are allowed to pray and prophesy in 1 Corinthians 11, but in 1 Corinthians 14 they may not participate “in the oral weighing of such prophecies.”²³ In 1 Corinthians 14:29, Paul tried to place order on the delivery of prophecy by saying, “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully [διακρινέτωσαν | *diakrinetōsan*]²⁴ what is said” (NIV). Hence, in this view women are allowed to exercise their ecstatic gifts but are banned from weighing or “sifting” the prophets’

¹⁶ Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 306; also, Fee, *Corinthians*, 703. However, Graydon Snyder suggests it could mean “prattle.” See Snyder, *First Corinthians*, 186.

¹⁷ Fee, *Corinthians*, 703.

¹⁸ Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 313.

¹⁹ Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, ed. Victor Paul Furnish (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 189; also, William F. Orr and James A. Walther, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation*, The Anchor Bible, ed. William F. Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1976), 312; cf. also Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 302.

²⁰ Charles K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in Black’s New Testament Commentary, ed. Henry Chadwick (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1968), 331. Barrett notes Aristophanes’ comedy entitled *Ecclesiazusae*, where women take over the Athenian assembly and create chaos (and apparently a very rip-roaring comedy that played on the fact that women should not and could not take on such political work).

²¹ C. H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (NY: Crossroad, 1987), 91-2. Talbert cites Livy (concerning Cato’s words), Juvenal (*Satires* 6), Philo (*Hypothetica*, 8.7.14) and Josephus (*Against Apion* 2.201). The wording in some of these citations and the underlying mentality toward women speaking in public seems to coincide rather nicely with vv. 34-35.

²² Collins, *First Corinthians*, 513-14.

²³ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 129. Carson notes that Thrall, Grudem and Hurley opt for this usage in 1 Cor. 14. See James B. Hurley, “Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 and 1 Cor. 14:33b-36,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 35, no. 2 (Winter 1973): 190-220.

²⁴ Anthony Thiselton prefers the translation, “let them sift.” The idea is to “differentiate” or “distinguish between” so it probably refers to distinguishing between God-given prophecy and that which is not (“self-generated rhetoric,” as Thiselton calls it). See Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1140.

messages.²⁵ Perhaps this was due to the rather universal belief in Greco-Roman society at the time that women were “softer of mind than a man and more subject to being flooded with emotion.”²⁶ Women were designated as an inferior species, similar to the male but less capable of intellectual or difficult work. For centuries before and after Paul’s time, medical descriptions of women had been along these lines: women are different from men in that they are loose and spongy in their flesh; their bodies soak up moisture because they are porous. A man’s body is firm and compact, not loose and spongy, and therefore is capable of greater intellectual and physical activity. Thus, is it proven that the female cannot do the same jobs as a male.²⁷ And so went the ancient line. These views of women certainly influenced the way people thought about public female participation in anything in society. When used by Grudem and others, it seems that they continue the problematic myth of female inadequacy by saying women could not be trusted to discern truth or weigh the evidence of spoken prophecies so the silence required is only concerning such “weighing carefully” what was said. The difficulty in this position is several fold:

- a) There is nothing in vv. 34-35 that says anything about the speech being focused only on weighing the prophecies just given;
- b) There is an assumption that Paul (and possibly the Corinthian men themselves) held to the belief that women were impaired cognitively whereas such a view does not seem to be supported anywhere in the New Testament or especially in Paul;²⁸
- c) The admonition in v. 29 is located too far away for readers to make a clear connection with vv. 34-35 (especially without any words pointing to it); and finally
- d) The presupposition (of Grudem and others) is that women cannot teach and such evaluating would be teaching. Pentecostals, however, would find this limitation odd: if the Spirit can fill a woman so that she overflows with prophetic utterance, then why can the Spirit not do the same by inspiring her to evaluate the words of others?

3. Is Paul quoting the Corinthians in vv. 34-35 and refuting them in v. 36?

A third group of interpreters understands these verses as Paul quoting some of the Corinthians’ sayings in order to refute them.²⁹ C.H. Talbert proposed this idea, noting that the

²⁵ Wayne Grudem suggests that since weighing prophecies would have verged into “teaching” territory and governing authority, in his opinion, this could not be allowed by Paul. See Wayne Grudem, “Prophecy—Yes, but Teaching—No: Paul’s Consistent Advocacy of Women’s Participation Without Governing Authority,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (March 1987): 20. It seems that Grudem limits his interpretation here in 1 Cor. 14 by how he has understood 1 Tim. 2:12.

²⁶ This statement comes from Chrysostom in the early 400s AD, but it had been the dominant belief since the days of Aristotle about 300 years before Christ. See Chrysostom, “Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, 37.1, in *1-2 Corinthians*, ed. and trans. Gerald Bray, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 143.

²⁷ An excellent article on this is by Lesley Dean-Jones, “The Cultural Construct of the Female Body in Classical Greek Science,” *Women’s History & Ancient History*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 114–5.

²⁸ Indeed, one could argue convincingly that both Jesus and Paul opened the Christian faith to the participation of women. For only one example of such argumentation, see Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Women* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 290–3.

²⁹ While Anthony Thiselton does not entirely land on this slogan approach, he does state that such a view is not “farfetched.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1150.

rhetorical form of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, and 36 is dialogical.³⁰ According to this interpretation, Paul quotes the Corinthian “slogans” (as he has done three times previously in the letter) and then rejects their argument (v. 36). When Paul rebuts the Corinthian quote, he uses a disjunctive particle in Greek both times in v. 36: ἢ ἢ ἢ, which means “or.” He does this twelve times in 1 Corinthians to argue against a Corinthian view.³¹ However, why did Paul not introduce these words in vv. 34-35 as some false teaching or slogan of the Corinthians? Talbert suggests that the strange and “discordant note may be regarded as the position of Paul’s opponents.”³² Moreover, the fact that Paul has addressed Corinthian “slogans” on previous occasions in the letter lends support for the idea that he may be doing it again here.³³ As Marion Soards states, while there is not a clear signal that this section is dialogical, the rebuttal proposal remains nonetheless “sensible and attractive.”³⁴

According to this view (the “slogan hypothesis”),³⁵ the Corinthians were not allowing women to speak (“women should remain silent in the churches”) and were requiring them to “be in submission,” as the law says (1 Cor. 14:34). This is the first “slogan.” The second is similar but with a different basis: they should not ask questions in church, but learn at home from their husbands, for it is “disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” (14:35). In verse 36, Paul begins with an extremely abrupt “Or” [ἢ ἢ ἢ] did the word of God originate with you?” And again, “Or are you the only people it has reached?” (NIV). This proposal suggests that the “adversative” use of “or” here is a strong statement against the Corinthians’ views as proposed in vv. 34-35. However, Walter Liefeld argues that Paul was adversarial because of the Corinthians’ disobedience of the requirement in vv. 34-35, not because of some adversative “or.”³⁶ Also, Craig Keener observes that when Paul deals with the “slogans” elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, they are “at least partly affirmed, though seriously qualified.”³⁷ One would have expected Paul to continue with that pattern here, but he does not.

Summary Thoughts

At this point, readers may appropriately wonder what all of this textual consideration and conjecture has this to do with women in church leadership? While we have seen some relevant points pop up here and there, it is important to attempt to grasp the overall importance of our inquiry for the church today. What does all of this mean? If scholars, who spend their lifetimes researching this material, cannot agree on the meaning of this text then how can we discern

³⁰ Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 92.

³¹ See Philip Payne’s succinct argument for and against this view in *Man and Woman*, 224; cf. also the discussion of this in Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 75.

³² Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 92.

³³ See Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Corinthian Slogans in 1 Cor 6:12-20,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1978): 391-396; also, see David W. Odell-Scott, “Let the Women Speak in Church: An Egalitarian Interpretation of 1 Cor 14:33b-36,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13 (1983): 90-93; also, J. E. Smith, “Slogans in 1 Corinthians,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (2010): 68-88.

³⁴ Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 304.

³⁵ This phrase is from Jill E. Marshall, *Women Praying and Prophesying in Corinth*, 206, fn. 56.

³⁶ Walter L. Liefeld, “Women, Submission and Ministry in 1 Corinthians,” in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 149.

³⁷ Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 76.

what is the best interpretation? As one commentator said, “One finally cannot decide from the evidence available which of the several suggestions for interpretation is absolutely correct.”³⁸

Clearly, we will need more than logic or reasoning—although we surely do need that. We will need the gift of discerning spirits, indeed, we will need the Holy Spirit himself to guide us into truth. What is the Spirit saying to the churches in the form of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35?

Allow us to submit a few key points that may be more than hypotheses along the way. These points seem to provide clarity to our grasp of what the Spirit was saying through Paul and what the Spirit is saying to us today.

1. The values expressed in this passage may reflect some of the *cultural values* of the first-century Greco-Roman world. The question for us is this: did God intend Paul to write a rule about Christian living according to a societal rule about what females should not do according to first-century cultural expectations? Or is Paul addressing a particular cultural view (patriarchal) when he asks women to be silent? Noted New Testament scholar, Ben Witherington, points out that when we read this passage over against other Pauline passages (like Gal. 3:28), we must understand that Paul is speaking as a missionary to this setting. As Witherington suggests, Paul’s “principle is to start where the people already are, not where he would like them to be.”³⁹ Perhaps there is a universal principle here, but most NT scholars do not think it is that all women should be silent in the churches. (As we shall see in point 5 below, there may be a different more universal principle about worshipping together).
2. Whatever the prohibition against women speaking here, it cannot be a command against Spirit-filled women participating in worship (since 1 Corinthians 11 allows for that). Paul is not contradicting himself only a few chapters removed from his previous statement in support of women praying and prophesying. Further, as Pentecostals we cannot support a woman being used of the Spirit in tongues, interpretation of tongues, or prophecy in public worship and then deny a woman being used of the Spirit to weigh the inspired speech of others.
3. In looking elsewhere in these verses for an explanation that makes sense of both 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14, it seems that various forms of speech had created disruption in the worship services at Corinth. We must understand that these gatherings were not in large arenas or even halls that could seat a few hundred people. First-century worship took place mainly in houses where anywhere from 10 to 75 people might gather. The context of chapter 14 describes a worship service that was out of order—and hence, Paul’s admonition that God is a God of peace [εἰρήνης | *eirēnēs*], not disorder [ἀκαταστασίας | *akatastasias*] (1 Cor. 14:33a). Tongues were flying everywhere—both heavenly and (apparently) earthly. If prophets rose to speak, they were interrupted by others rising to speak their most recent revelation. Gifts of the Spirit were operating with full force in Corinthian worship, but the fruit of the Spirit (especially love) was absent. Moreover, believers could not make much sense of what was happening and unbelievers walked away saying, “They’re all mad!” (1 Cor. 14:23 NASB).

³⁸ Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 307.

³⁹ Ben Witherington III, “Why Arguments against Women in Ministry Aren’t Biblical,” *Patheos*: Blog, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2015/06/02/why-arguments-against-women-in-ministry-arent-biblical/?utm_medium=social&utm_source=share_bar#bxeZrWkRiK6ySj7Y.01 (02 June 2015). Retrieved 27 February 2019.

4. Therefore, for the cause of Christ and his body of believers, Paul harnesses the chaos with orderly rules—one of which relates precisely to the cause of chaos, namely, disruptive speech. How do we know this is the case? Verse 35 explains that women should be silent and “inquire about something” from their husbands at home. The imperative verb here for “let them inquire” [ἐπερωτάτωσαν | *eperōtatōsan*] is used in Mark 14:60-61 of the high priest “interrogating” Jesus. It can even mean, “to accost one with an inquiry.”⁴⁰ Within the church at Corinth it seems likely that there were multiple people (men and women) speaking out ecstatically and somewhat randomly. While tongues, interpretation, and prophecy were going on in a rather confusing manner, there were also women (in particular) who were probing their husbands for answers to questions that arose from what was being said. The din of voices must have been so cacophonous that Paul attempted to rope the entire process into a corral of order. Women in such a specific setting are to be silent—to stop speaking [σιγάτωσαν | *sigatōsan*]. It is the disruptive speech that is being clamped down by Paul, not ecstatic speech or prophecy or even judgment on the prophecy. He has already described that tongues/interpretation should occur in an orderly fashion with two or “at the most three” speaking “one at a time” (1 Cor. 14:27). In addition, “two or three prophets should speak” in a similar orderly manner with the “rest” weighing what was said (1 Cor. 14:29). Finally, if a spontaneous revelation “comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged” (1 Cor. 14:30-31). There must be *control* of the spiritual impulses, because the “spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets” (1 Cor. 14:32). All of this is because God is a God of peace, not disorder or confusion. Paul seems to be crafting a manual for spiritual speech in the congregation that is specifically addressed to the situation in Corinth. It is here that the problem created by women in the worship service is discussed. He addresses the particular disturbance in Corinth and the contribution that women were making to it. For the sake of the gospel, it must cease. For the sake of the common edification of the body, it must cease.
5. Why is this admonition for silence addressed to women and not men? Apparently, it was the women who were asking questions as to what speakers were saying in the church. Why were the men not accused of the same thing? To be sure, there is nothing wrong with asking questions *per se*. Paul was addressing the *timing* of these questions, which arose in the midst of confusing worship. As someone trained under a Jewish rabbi, Paul understood the role that good questioning plays in learning.⁴¹ However, as a good Jewish leader, Paul also understood the prejudice against women of his day studying the Torah—something that was usually forbidden in first-century Judaism. One can rather easily surmise a situation in which some of the men in the worship setting were better trained in the language and concepts of the Hebrew Scriptures—especially those who were Jews that had converted to Christianity. Yet we can also

⁴⁰ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1159-60. In Mark 14:60, the high priest “questioned” [ἐπηρώτησεν | *epērōtēsēn*] Jesus, (NASB) but he remained silent. In 14:61, again the high priest “questioned” (NASB) [ἐπηρώτα | *epērōta*] Jesus. The first instance of the verb is an aorist active indicative, pointing either to a completed action or observing the action as a whole; the second instance is an imperfect active indicative, noting the process of continually asking in the past. This latter one could be translated, “the high priest kept on questioning him...”

⁴¹ Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 82.

surmise that not everyone in the congregation was a converted Jew—some were Gentiles who had converted to Christianity. Whether Jew or Gentile, the women in the Corinthian church were more likely not to know what was going on through prophecy or tongues and needed explanations from their husbands. This is clearly implied in the text itself (1 Cor. 14:35). As Craig Keener states, “we have good reason to believe that women were usually considerably less trained in the Scriptures than their husbands, and hence more prone to err or ask irrelevant questions.”⁴²

Another possible scenario that may clarify the Corinthian situation is that the church was largely a Gentile one. Ben Witherington suggests that some of the Gentile’s previous understanding about how to approach prophets may have been at play here. For example, the oracle at Delphi (which is near Corinth) was a “consultative prophethess,”⁴³ which means people would ask her questions directly and she would provide an answer. “Thus it was natural for some Corinthians to think that when prophets spoke in their assemblies, they had a right to ask them questions.”⁴⁴ What may have been the new believers’ recent pagan context for understanding prophecy could have influenced them so that they were pestering the prophets with questions. Paul instructs these wives that the place to interrogate further on these questions is with their husbands at home. Silence is demanded instead of interrogation because in this way, wives will be in submission to God’s message through the prophets.⁴⁵

Moreover, it is crucially important to note that Paul does not deny women or wives the information needed to grow as a Christian. She can learn at home from her husband. In the Greco-Roman world of the first century AD, this was an extremely progressive idea—that women could and should learn from their husbands.⁴⁶ Paul’s admonition for silence among the women in Corinth was not offered to stifle their opinions or views, but rather to limit their questioning speech in public worship so that the body may be edified. **The needs of the *whole* community override the concerns of *part* of the community—that is the universal principle here, not that all women everywhere for all time should be silent in worship.** In this crucial text, it is necessary to see that a hermeneutic of “just reading the plain sense of the words” will not procure a clear understanding of what Paul is talking about. It is important that order be maintained in worship, so wives may learn from their husbands in the privacy of their own homes rather than interrogating their husbands (or the prophets) in the public arena of an already confused worship setting.

6. A difficulty remains in this passage for the contemporary church to consider. To what extent are Paul’s words to the Corinthian congregation meant to be understood as a specific appeal to a particular situation as opposed to a universal command for women

⁴² Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 84.

⁴³ Witherington, “Why Arguments against Women in Ministry Aren’t Biblical.”

⁴⁴ Witherington, “Why Arguments against Women in Ministry Aren’t Biblical.”

⁴⁵ It is important to note that nothing is said in this text about submitting to men or husbands. They are to be “in submission” even as the law says. But in submission to whom? The law, which Paul points to, does not have one passage like this command (namely, to be silent and submit to men). To what, then, is Paul referring? Could it be cultural custom—it’s simply not to be done this way, even among the Gentiles? Yet we know women were prophetesses in the pagan culture, so to what law is Paul referring? We simply do not know. Witherington may have a point when he says this: “What Paul is talking about is being silent in the presence of God and listening to his inspired words, in this case coming from the prophets and prophetesses!” See Witherington, “Why Arguments against Women in Ministry Aren’t Biblical.”

⁴⁶ Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 84.

to be silent in worship? It appears that a careful reading of the context clarifies that this is a *specific* command to a *specific* problem in Corinth. However, as in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul also appeals to the “law” (14:34) and the common custom of the churches (14:35). Do these two appeals to the law and church custom amount to a universal command for the silence of women? Or do these appeals simply underscore Paul’s point regarding the remedy to the specific problem of wives speaking out of turn and adding to the chaos? At this point, frankly, the text does not help us as much as we would like. Such difficulties require an entire framework from which to interpret these types of passages (in other words, a hermeneutic).

How can the church move forward in understanding whether a position described in Paul’s writing is meant universally or only specifically for a given situation in Corinth? First, it will be important to develop together a Pentecostal hermeneutic through which we might read and discuss these difficult passages. The Doctrine & Polity Committee is currently utilizing various Pentecostal scholars’ writings on hermeneutics in order to compose some helpful guidelines for a Pentecostal way of interpreting the text of Scripture. Second, the church might consider how Christians (especially in North America) came to view slavery as something that is inappropriate for Christians. Since the New Testament seems neither to condone or condemn the practice of slavery, how did Christians come to understand it as a sinful practice? Most Christian churches today view slavery as inhumane and unjust in its treatment of other human beings made in the image of God. Yet there are clear instructions from Paul to slaves and masters in the so-called “household codes” of Colossians and Ephesians that seem to point to keeping the status quo of slavery in the first century. For centuries, this was used by some Christians to participate in holding slaves, or even buying and selling them. It is clear from sermons and records from the 1800s in the United States that numerous preachers were supportive of slavery because the “plain sense” of the Scripture pointed to its existence (and implicitly, then, to some kind of support for it). Yet this plain sense reading missed the nuances of Paul’s comments to churches in a society where Christianity was a minority religion and slavery was the status quo of the Roman Empire. It also missed the clear call from Jesus to treat others as we would like to be treated.

Two passages may assist us in viewing slavery as something Paul (in this case) allowed as a part of the fabric of pagan society, but also as something not reflective of the values of the kingdom of God (and therefore something to be changed). First, Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ there is no nationalism or racism (“neither Jew nor Greek”), no slave domination (“neither slave nor free”) no genderism (“neither male nor female”), “for you all are one in Christ” (ESV). While some people view this only as a snapshot of the future eschaton awaiting us in heaven, it seems that Paul intended for there to be some glimpse of such a slave-free, gender-free, race-free society in the church here and now. The second passage in Philemon 16 helps us see Paul’s intent on slavery even more closely. Paul speaks directly to his brother in Christ, Philemon, to forgive the runaway slave, Onesimus. In so doing, he might him back forever, “no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother” (ESV). Essentially, Paul is hinting for Philemon to free Onesimus and take him in as a brother, not a slave. It may be instructive, then, to examine the changes of our attitudes toward slavery as helpful in reviewing our hermeneutical approaches to the situation with women and leadership as found in these particular texts of Scripture. It is here where our prayerful,

communal study of the texts of Scripture as well as the enlightening insight from the Holy Spirit are needed most desperately to be able to decipher how to take these texts as the Word of God to the churches.